

Standard-Setting Code System Report

November 2016

Contents

Standard	2
Scope	2
Sustainability outcomes and justification	2
Performance level	3
Adaptations	3
Standard-Setting and Revision Process	3
When standard was first written and by whom	3
Stakeholder categorization and geography	3
Summary of the review and revision process	4
Governance and decision making process	4

Standard

Scope

ASC aims to be the world's leading certification and labelling programme for responsibly farmed seafood. ASC works with aquaculture producers, seafood processors, retail and foodservice companies, scientists, conservation groups and consumers to:

- Recognise and reward responsible aquaculture through the ASC aquaculture certification programme and seafood label.
- Promote best environmental and social choice when buying seafood.
- Contribute to transforming seafood markets towards sustainability.

There are seven (7) operational standards covering a dozen fish species cultured in all over the world. One final standard of the WWF Aquaculture Dialogue for *Seriola/Cobia* was handed over to ASC in February 2015 and its audit manual has been field-tested in 2016. The standard and audit manual are receiving the final touch before being released.

As an independent standard setting organisation, ASC has been developing its own standard for aquaculture feed. The 2nd draft standard is being finalised for the 2nd round of public consultation period. ASC also manages the review and revision processes of all the standards that it has received from WWF as the Aquaculture Dialogues no longer exist.

Sustainability outcomes and justification

The rapid rise in demand for farmed fish presents new problems. When aquaculture is not well managed, it can have a range of adverse impacts, for example: poor site management, water pollution, disruption of local ecosystems and poor working conditions. The faster the aquaculture industry grows, the greater its potential impact on the environment and local communities. Now is the time to address this.

By promoting better-managed fish farming, we can meet the growing demand while minimising environmental and social impacts.

The ASC standards help protect communities and farm workers and the environment, and work to ensure the ongoing viability of the aquaculture industry.

The ASC standards present a rigorous template for best practice and relate to:

1. Legal compliance (e.g. obeying the law, the legal right to operate)
2. Preservation of the natural environment and biodiversity
3. Preservation of water resources
4. Preservation of diversity of species and wild populations (e.g. preventing escapes which could pose a threat to wild fish)
5. Responsible use of animal feed and other resources
6. Animal health (e.g. no unnecessary use of antibiotics and chemicals)
7. Social responsibility (e.g. no child labour, health and safety of workers, freedom of assembly, community relations).

Performance level

The ASC standards outline best practices that are typically metric-based performance indicators. ASC definition of 'best practice' is that at the launch of a standard, approximately 15 per cent of the best performing farms will be able to meet that standard's requirements. Collectively the standards represent a challenging but achievable test for farms wishing to demonstrate compliance with the ASC's farm standards.

The standards are structured in seven principles that are high-level goals, once being achieved would contribute to achieving the defined outcome. Each principle is composed of several criteria, which are focus areas that, if implemented properly, would contribute to achieving the high-level goals (principles). The extent of implementation of a criterion is measured by indicators with respective requirements setting specific performance levels.

ASC certified products could bear the ASC logo. The use of the ASC logo can be applied only to products that are sold through a consecutive, certified chain of custody that ensures traceability of certified products from production to final point of sale. For ASC, chain of custody is certified through application of the MSC chain of custody system, to which ASC CoC requirements have been added as a scope, to ASC certified aquaculture products. Only products that originate from ASC certified farms and are sold through an MSC certified chain of custody (with ASC CoC scope) are eligible to carry the ASC logo.

Adaptations

ASC standards are designed for international use. Neither local standards nor regional/national interpretations exist at present. ASC does not exclude this possibility if the need for it is proven to be real.

However, there is a mechanism that allows exceptions to be requested and approved by a committee that consists of two academic members of the Technical Advisory Board, the CEO and Standards Director of ASC. The requests must be clearly explained and justified and are all published in full to the ASC website. Analysis of the requests may trigger the need to have local interpretation or adaptation.

At the moment ASC is running 2 streams of work, being group certification and harmonisation/ core standards. The aim of group certification is to make the system more accessible to small farmers while the harmonisation process aims to streamline the existing standards to gain more efficiency for all standards users.

ASC is also collaborating with other major standards in the sector (e.g. GlobalG.A.P. and GAA/BAP, VietGAP) to improve efficiency for producers through comparing standards and audit checklists and benchmarking with those standards schemes.

Standard-Setting and Revision Process

When standard was first written and by whom

Through a series of WWF-led Aquaculture Dialogues, more than 2,200 people participated in the development of the ASC Standards including fish farmers, seafood processors, retailers, foodservice operators, NGOs, government agencies, and research institutes.

ASC received the first standards in 2011 and last one in February 2015. At the same time, ASC is also developing a new standard for aquaculture feed that is expected to be ready in 2017.

Stakeholder categorization and geography

Identified stakeholder groups are:

- Farmers
- Industry, including suppliers/ processors and retailers
- Feed mills
- Civil society organisations with focus on both major areas of the standards – environmental and social
- Scientists
- Governments
- Communities adjacent to farms seeking certification
- Conformity assessment bodies (CABs), and

- Other related standards (e.g. MSC, GlobalG.A.P., GAA, RSB, RSPO, etc.).

For simplicity, those stakeholder groups are categorized as industry (the first three groups) and non-industry (the other groups).

Summary of the review and revision process

Stakeholders can provide input for standard setting process at any time. There is a comment submission form available on the website for that purpose. Standard content related submissions are logged for periodic review (yearly), whereas comments related to standard setting process are handled according to the complaint mechanism.

Even though the usual maximal interval for reviewing a standard is five years, analysis of comments logged through the year may trigger an early review and potentially revision of a standard. In any case a proposal for review/revision of the standard will be prepared for the ASC's Supervisory Board to make decision upon.

Once the Terms Of Reference (TOR) for a standard to be revised is ready, stakeholders are notified and invited to comment on it. If need be, the TOR will be updated afterwards. The TOR usually includes timelines for major milestones of the revision process that covers public consultation period(s).

When the draft revision is ready, stakeholders as mapped out in TOR are proactively informed and invited to take part in the public consultation. A comment submission form is conveniently prepared for stakeholders to submit their input. Depending on the extent of the revision, in-person workshops or webinars and pilots will be held. This is normally foreseen when preparing the TOR, thus included in there and decided upon during the revision process by the revision process governance (working group or steering committee).

Local workshops or webinars are major means to reach out to the most affected groups, being local farmers and communities. Besides, local NGOs and CABs are also instrumental for disseminating the information and getting input from them.

At the moment there are two standards revision processes going on. One is called Operational review and the other one is Core/Harmonisation.

The Operational review started in spring 2015, triggered by received feedback from standards users. The process took place before the regular 5-year period was reached. It has lead to revision of three standards, namely Salmon, Tilapia and Pangasius. Public consultation on changes in the standards will take place early in 2017.

The Core/Harmonised process looks at all existing standards developed by different Aquaculture Dialogues and harmonises overlaps across the standards. Where requirements differ, they will be in species-specific annexes. The draft Core standard has just undergone the first public consultation period (closed mid November 2016).

Governance and decision making process

There are three major governance bodies involved in the standard setting process:

- The Supervisory Board (SB) having the ultimate authority to approve the standards
- The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) endorses the standards content and recommends the SB to approve them
- The Steering Committee (SC)/Technical Working Group (TWG) steers the process and develops/revises the content of the standards.

These bodies consist of 50% members from industry and 50% members from non-industry categories of stakeholders. All governance bodies strive to reach consensus when it comes to making decisions. If consensus cannot be reached, majority voting will apply.

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